

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings give us an insight into God's plan for all of us and for each of us.

According to today's Gospel, God's plan for all of us and each of us is to bring us all together as one in the kingdom of God. At the same time, in the final verse of today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.*" In other words, God's standards are different from the world's standards. Some of the people who are most important in this world will be least in God's kingdom while some of those who are least important in this world will be greatest in God's kingdom. God's plan is to reconcile us with himself and with one another in Christ.

However, today's Gospel seems to contradict last Sunday's disturbing Gospel when Jesus told his disciples that he came not to bring peace on earth but division, which also contradicts Jesus' promise of the gift of his peace in John's Gospel. It is important to understand that Jesus does not cause division. However, people's choices to follow him or not follow him often cause division. This is certainly true today. There is so much division everywhere that it is hard to believe that peace is even possible. That is why we are called carry on the work of Jesus by being healers and reconcilers, by tearing down walls and building bridges wherever possible.

The first and second readings help us understand God's plan for each of us, i.e., how God is going to use us to bring about this reconciliation of all peoples. In the first reading, God through Isaiah tells us that he knows our works and our thoughts. In other words, knowing each of us, God has a unique part for each of us to play in his plan of salvation.

However, for each of us, it is going to involve going out and coming back. Each of us is called to go out to proclaim the good news of Jesus in word and deed in every part of our lives. We have to go out of ourselves to our family, our friends, our neighbors, our parish, our community, our work or school, and even our leisure activities. As Pope Francis reminds us, we are also to go out to the margins and the marginalized. Likewise, we are also called to be missionaries to the world through our prayers and support for missionaries such as Sr. Selvi, who was here last weekend. We have a tremendous opportunity and challenge. God is asking us to make living and sharing the Good News of Jesus part of the fabric of our being. If we live the Gospel and make the Gospel attractive to others, we then lead them to God. In other words, our task is to bring Christ to others and others to Christ.

Today's second reading refers to God disciplining us. This Scriptural image is also disturbing. How does God discipline us? I would suggest that God's discipline refers to life's trials, trials which we all have. In other words, all the challenges of our lives, if we respond to them with faith, love, and hope, call forth the best in us, help us become the-best-version-of-ourselves.

My brothers and sisters, at the same time, it is our choice whether or not we follow Jesus. However, today's Gospel contains some of the most sobering words of the New Testament. At the moment of our death, the last thing we would want Jesus to say to us is "*I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!*"